

Easter

*The World's Best
News*

WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

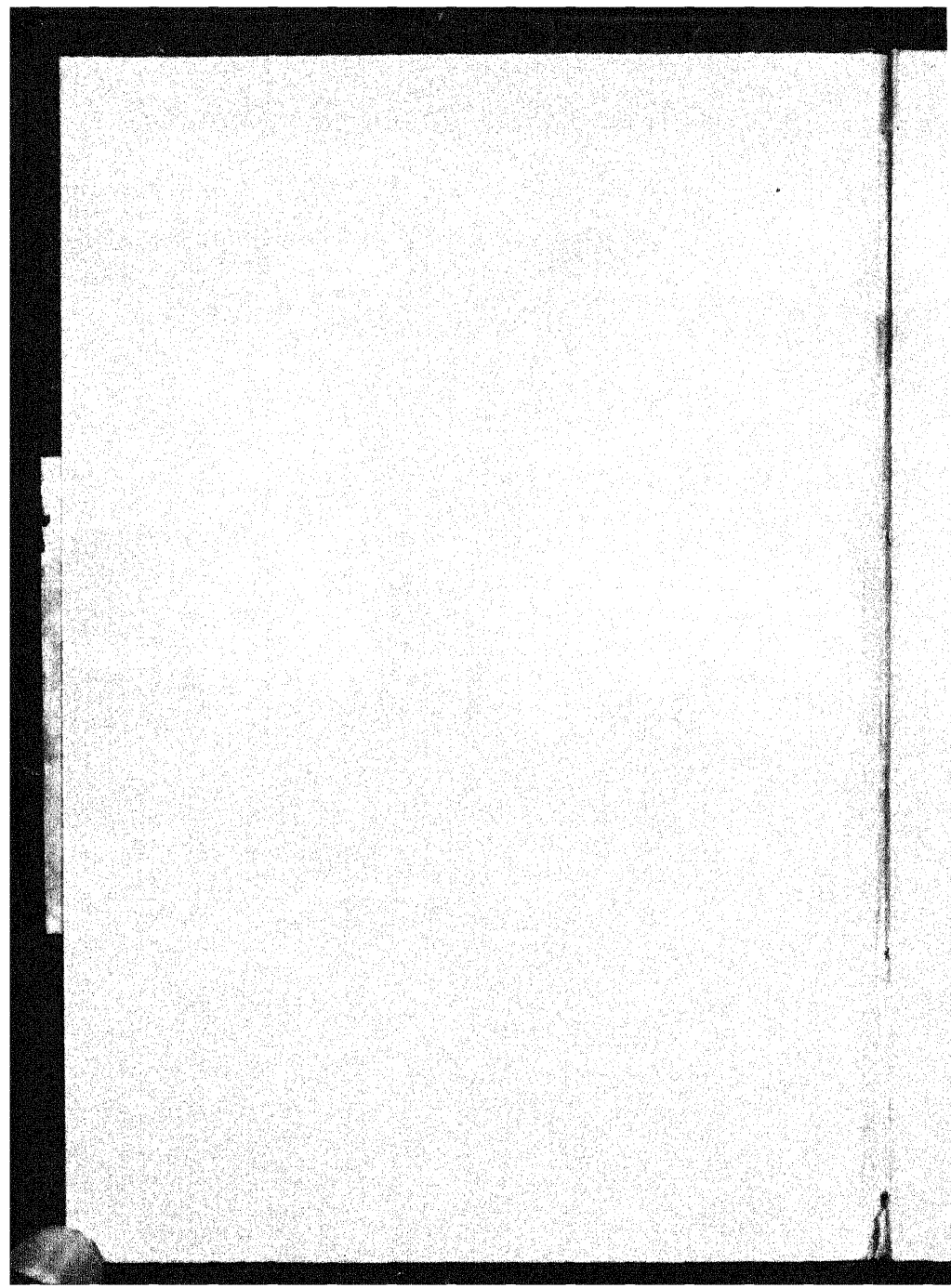
1865-



NEW YORK

Fleming H. Revell Company

LONDON AND EDINBURGH



Copyright ~~mcxxxx~~ by
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

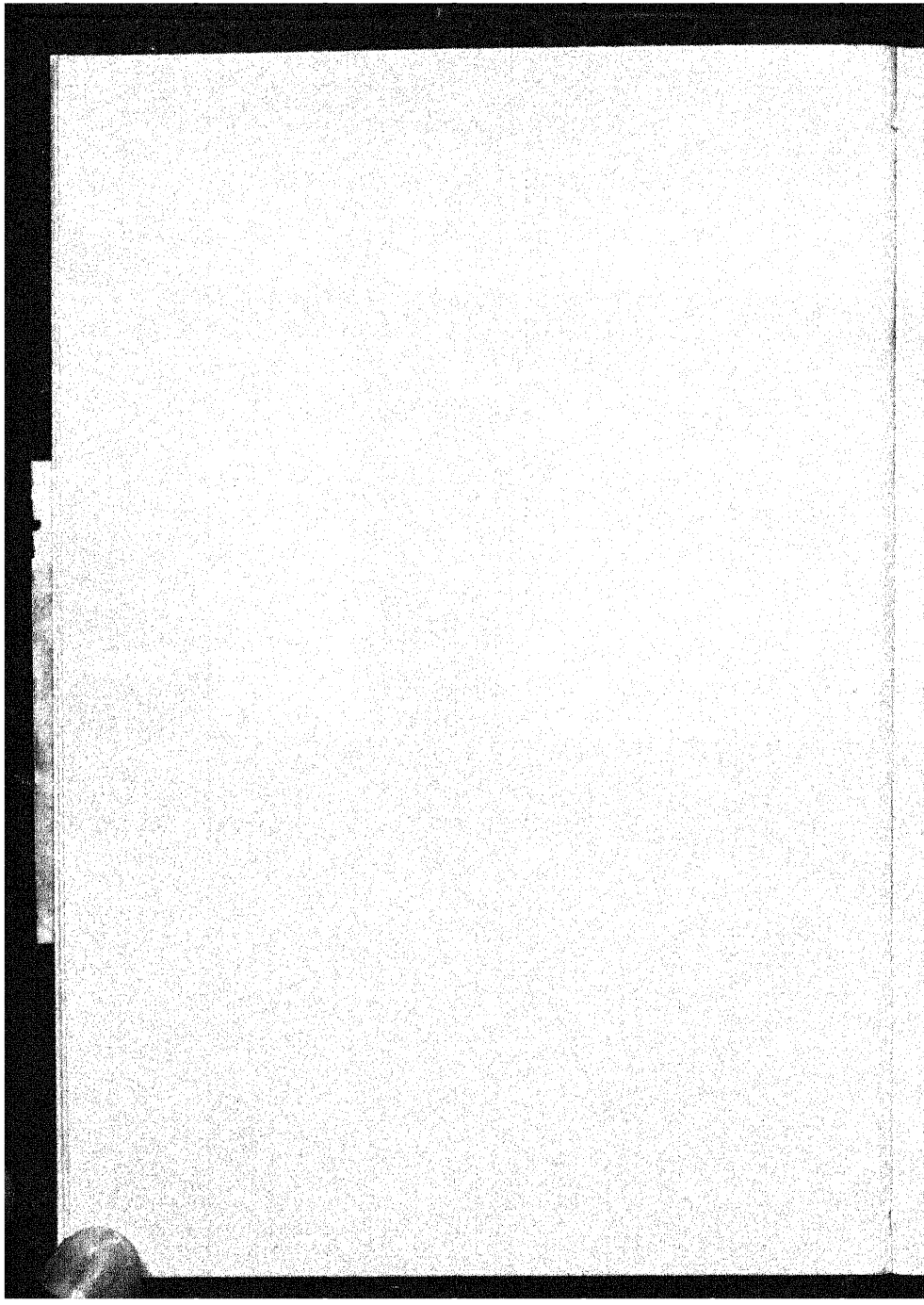
New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
London: 11 Paternoster Square

41e

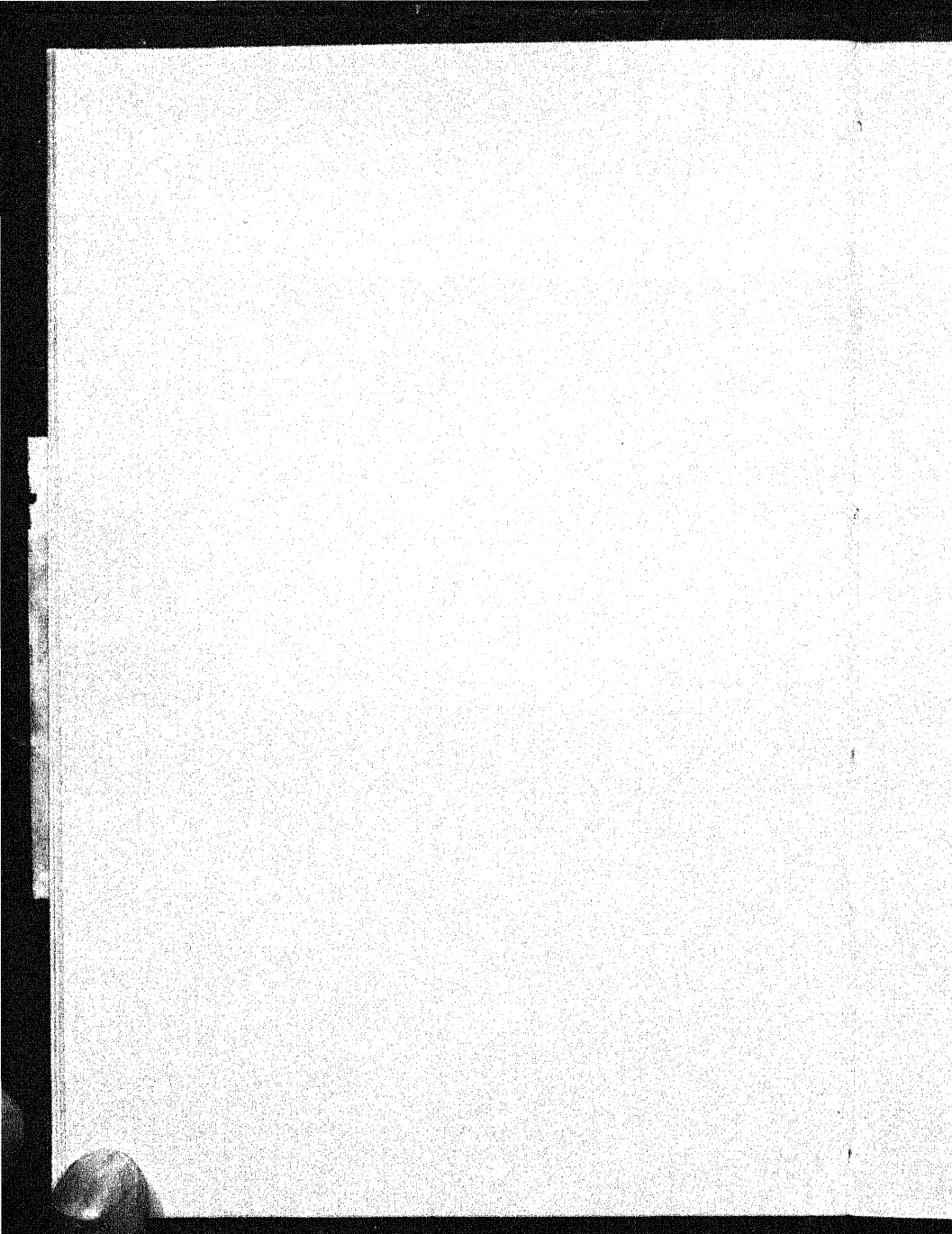
CONTENTS

I THE WORLD'S BEST NEWS	11
II THE FEAR OF DEATH	17
III THE JOY OF VICTORY	23
IV THE GREATEST GIFT	31
"LET ME GO ON!"	39


56



THE WORLD'S BEST NEWS



I
THE WORLD'S
BEST NEWS

F YOU wish absolute accuracy, do not say "Easter Sunday." Say either Easter or Easter Day. The Sunday is included in the word; and to say Easter Sunday is really like saying Thanksgiving Thursday.

A fairly common surname in English is *Lovejoy*. No name is more Christian in its origin and significance. The two syllables are the key-notes of the Christian religion; they naturally go together, for the first

begets the second. In musical parlance, the first chord is a suspension, the second a solution.

I come of strictly Puritan stock, and am glad of it. But it is difficult to forgive the Puritans for taking delight and mirth out of the practice of religion.

In a famous play by Strindberg, the Baptist aunt said to the unbelieving captain, "Why don't you believe in the love of God?" and the captain replied, "Look here, Auntie, why is it that whenever you speak of the love of God, you look so hateful? A positively venomous expression comes into your eyes. No, Auntie, you have not got the true faith." She

was a bad advertisement of religion.

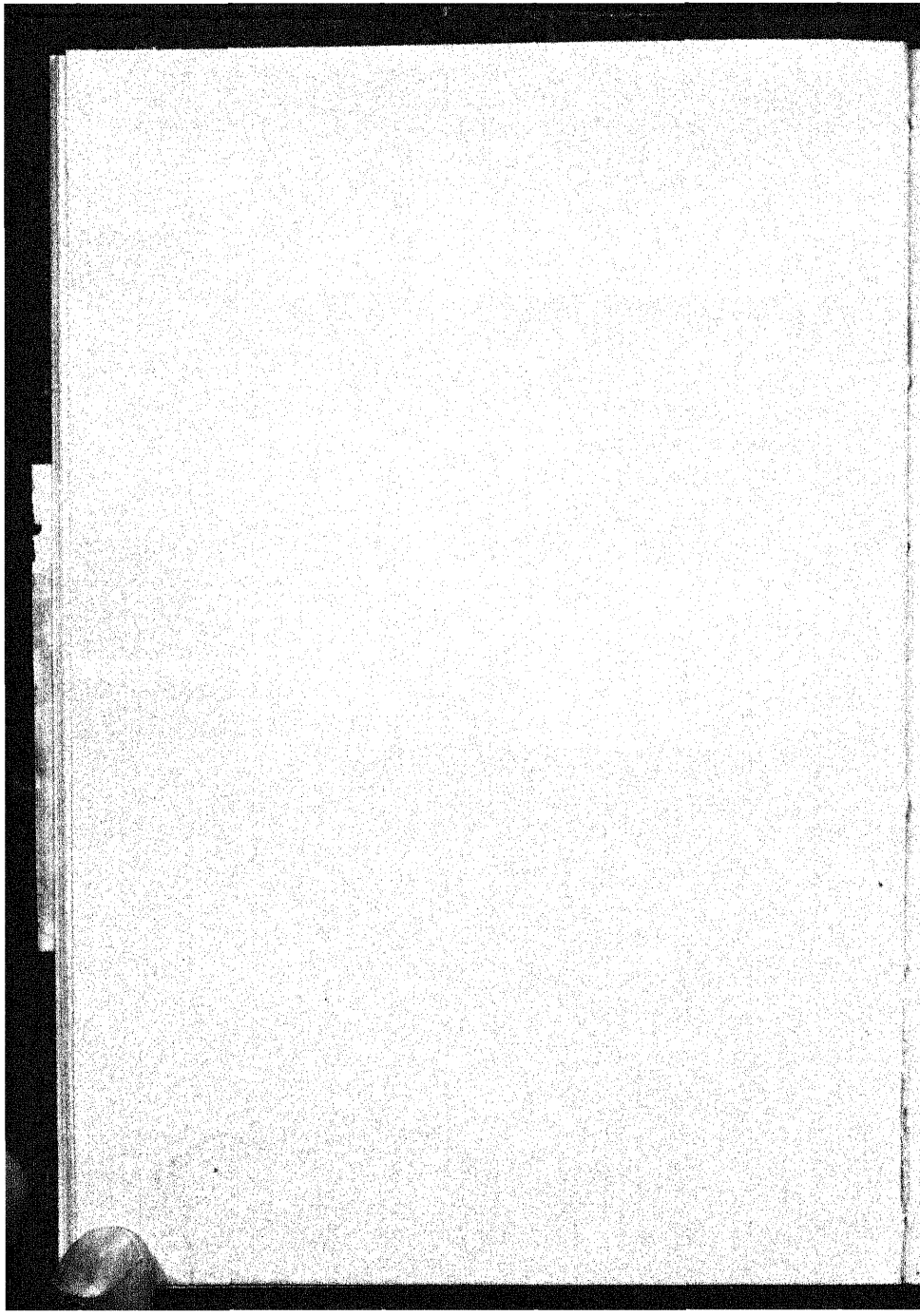
Life is serious. Such was the motto of Carlyle's *Past and Present*—"Ernst ist das Leben." The Christian lives in eternity, and the strength of his sympathy for humanity makes his heart ache at the enormous amount of suffering, poverty, wickedness, and cruelty in the world. But, perhaps, this very darkness makes the Light shine all the more brightly; surely the Light is not superfluous. In the difficult part of life, we need the Light; and it is encouraging to remember that the adverse winds of nineteen centuries have not been able to extinguish it.

The two great *feasts* of the Christian

religion are Christmas and Easter—both days of joy. They are celebrated to-day by more people than at any previous time. The Incarnation and the Resurrection make the best news the world has ever received.

It is fortunate that both of these tremendous ideas are within the understanding of a little child, and can not be outgrown by the wisest years of intellectual maturity. For the four Gospels in which they are contained constitute a masterpiece of literature, outshining in sheer excellence the best works of Shakespeare and Homer.

THE FEAR OF DEATH



II

THE FEAR OF DEATH

TO ATTAIN eminence in the law or in medicine or in engineering, one must give one's mind to years of assiduous study; merely to converse intelligently with Einstein requires almost a life-time of mathematical research. But one does not have to attend a university or pursue learning in a graduate school to obtain the secret of Christianity; sometimes its secret is hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes; even as the least in the kingdom of Heaven is

greater than the most brilliant citizen of any other kingdom.

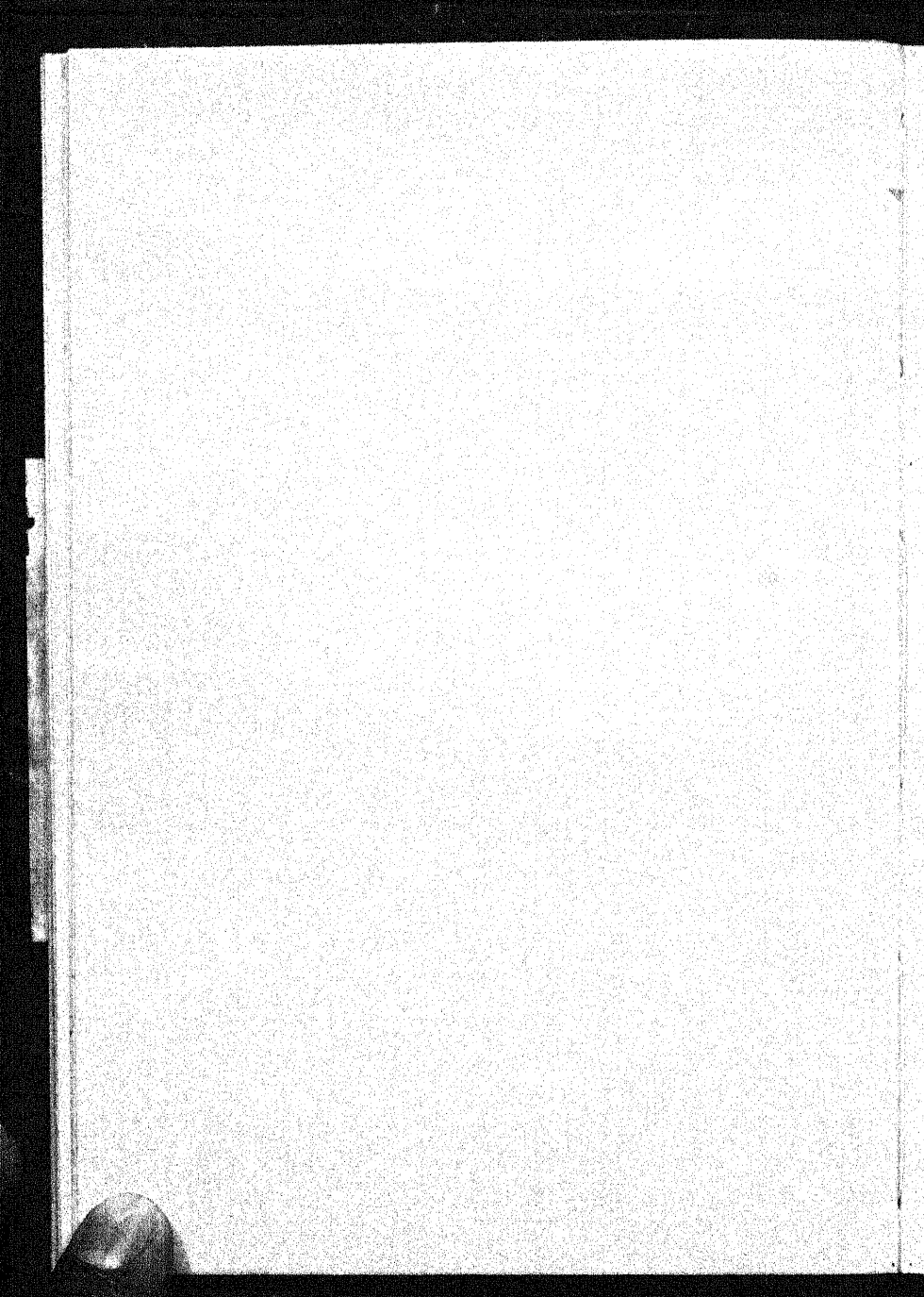
All men and women who are fighters, whether they fight foes without or more insidious foes within, realize the supreme sweetness of victory. Victory is always the goal of battle. No matter what the personal qualities of a commander may be, if he lead his soldiers to victory after victory, he will receive their unquestioning adoration. We know how hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen followed wherever Napoleon chose to go. We know that when he returned almost alone from Elba, and the armed forces of the kingdom went out to crush him, he said, "Soldiers,

it is the Emperor!" and they left all and followed him. The thrilling song "Two Grenadiers" expresses the deathless devotion of the Old Guard. Even to-day, after the lapse of more than a century, it is impossible to read of Napoleon or to think of him without feeling his spell.

But of all the leaders of men of whom we have any record, Our Lord stands immeasurably first. No other was ever so independent, so free from fear, so indifferent to consequences. As He was never afraid of any earthly power or potentate or of the hostility of organized public opinion, so He feared neither life nor death. The great dramatist Ibsen, after he had

attained the height of his ambition, said it took more courage to live than to die. On the other hand, Doctor Johnson, who showed unflinching courage in daily life, had the icy sweat of fear whenever he thought of death.

THE JOY OF VICTORY



III

THE JOY OF VICTORY



OUR Lord never minimized life's tragedies. But He said "Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." It will be well if we remember in the hours of despondency that we follow a Conqueror; who in the midst of turbulence remained inwardly serene. In the trial before Pilate, He was the only person in the hall who was wholly calm.

Easter celebrates His final and most decisive victory, when the King of Terrors was defeated by the King

of Kings. He had given an illustration of His power over death in the resurrection of Lazarus. No event recorded in the New Testament, with the two exceptions of the birth and death of Jesus himself, has had a greater germinal effect on literature than Lazarus. It is the inspiration of innumerable stories, poems, and plays. But until Browning wrote his poem on the Strange Medical Experience of Karhsish, novelists and poets had missed the supreme significance of the story. They had all concentrated their attention on those veiled days in the tomb—where was Lazarus then, was he conscious, what did he see beyond the bourne?

Browning is not interested in that at all. The question he asks is not what happened to Lazarus in the tomb, but what effect did that experience have on his character? Was Lazarus exactly the same man he had been before his rehearsal of death? For, just as there are people who hear sublime music, have amazing adventures, and see the wonders of the world, without any resulting change in themselves, so there are others whose characters are transformed by one experience.

Such was Browning's Lazarus. He was spiritually reborn, his whole scale of values reversed. Eugene O'Neill, in his drama, *Lazarus Laughed*, has

consciously or unconsciously followed in the wake of Browning.

For, if we do not profit by experience, we are as well off without it.

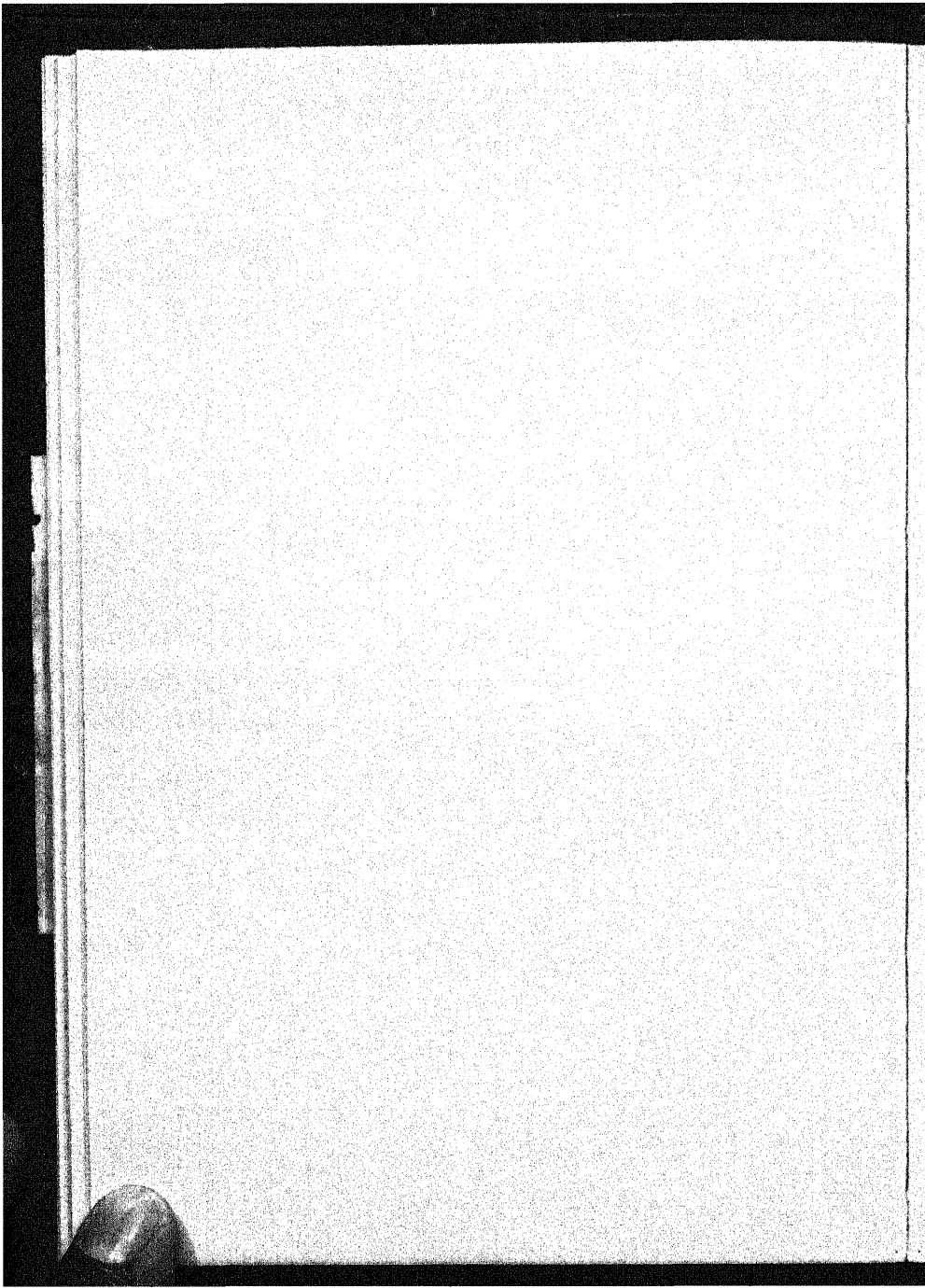
The Christian Church is founded on Easter. It is pleasant to see the whole world rejoicing. Even what the newspapers call the Easter Parade of fashion has its peculiar grace. Men and women put on shining sartorial uniforms and walk in the sunlight. The former resplendence of the "Easter Bonnet" had a certain charm. If ever there was an occasion for the display of glittering apparel, it is Easter. We are celebrating a victory infinitely greater and more far-reaching than that of Armistice Day.

I happened to attend Easter service in a Catholic Church in Augusta; the priest remarked in his sermon, "If Christ did not rise from the dead, the Catholic Church would be the greatest enigma in all human history." And so it would.

Something tremendous happened. The disciples had deserted him on the only occasion when He really felt a need of them. Their high hopes of the coming kingdom were shattered; their leader, after all his confident talk, actually died; and died the ignominious and horrible death of a miserable criminal, accompanied in His last agony by two common thieves.


Then, on the third day, came sunrise—the most magnificent dawn humanity has known. The formerly despairing and scattered disciples reunited in triumph. No more doubt, no more questioning, no more uncertainty, no more gloom. The early apostolic days were marked by a confidence which nothing could dim. Out of their joyous triumphant *certainty* came the Christian Church. Never was there in any assemblage a more complete transformation—it was the change from utter and apparently hopeless defeat to the obstreperous joy of victory.

THE GREATEST GIFT



IV

THE GREATEST GIFT

T IS not my purpose to argue about the Resurrection. But to those who wish to read on that aspect of the question, I will recommend two books—*According to Saint John*, by Lord Charnwood, and *Who Moved the Stone?* by Frank Morison. Lord Charnwood is a professional biographer; he is the author of the best one-volume Life of Lincoln. He began the study of the Fourth Gospel with an open mind; applying the same methods and tests that he would use

in any serious work of historical or biographical investigation. In his own words, he emerged from this study "an ordinary Christian." Frank Morison, another Englishman, investigated the story of "the empty tomb" in the legal style of a search for evidence; he tells the results in a manner that gains in impressiveness by the absence of sentiment.

There is more and better evidence for the Resurrection than for any other miracle. It is encouraging to remember that the story is told in all four Gospels, and that it was the foundation as well as the inspiration of the whole career of St. Paul.

But the most important fact is,

and will be, its direct effect on our own spiritual lives. We cannot live richly and fully, and certainly not hopefully and joyously, without the mystery of the Unknown, without the thought of something beyond our earthly existence. Browning, in his poem, *Easter Day*, imagines himself for a moment offered the gift by God of continuous and eternal life in this world with good health and good mental powers, with everything we ask for day by day—only, with the certainty that this is all—no mysterious future, no hope beyond this pleasant routine. The thought becomes unendurable.

We read occasionally of someone

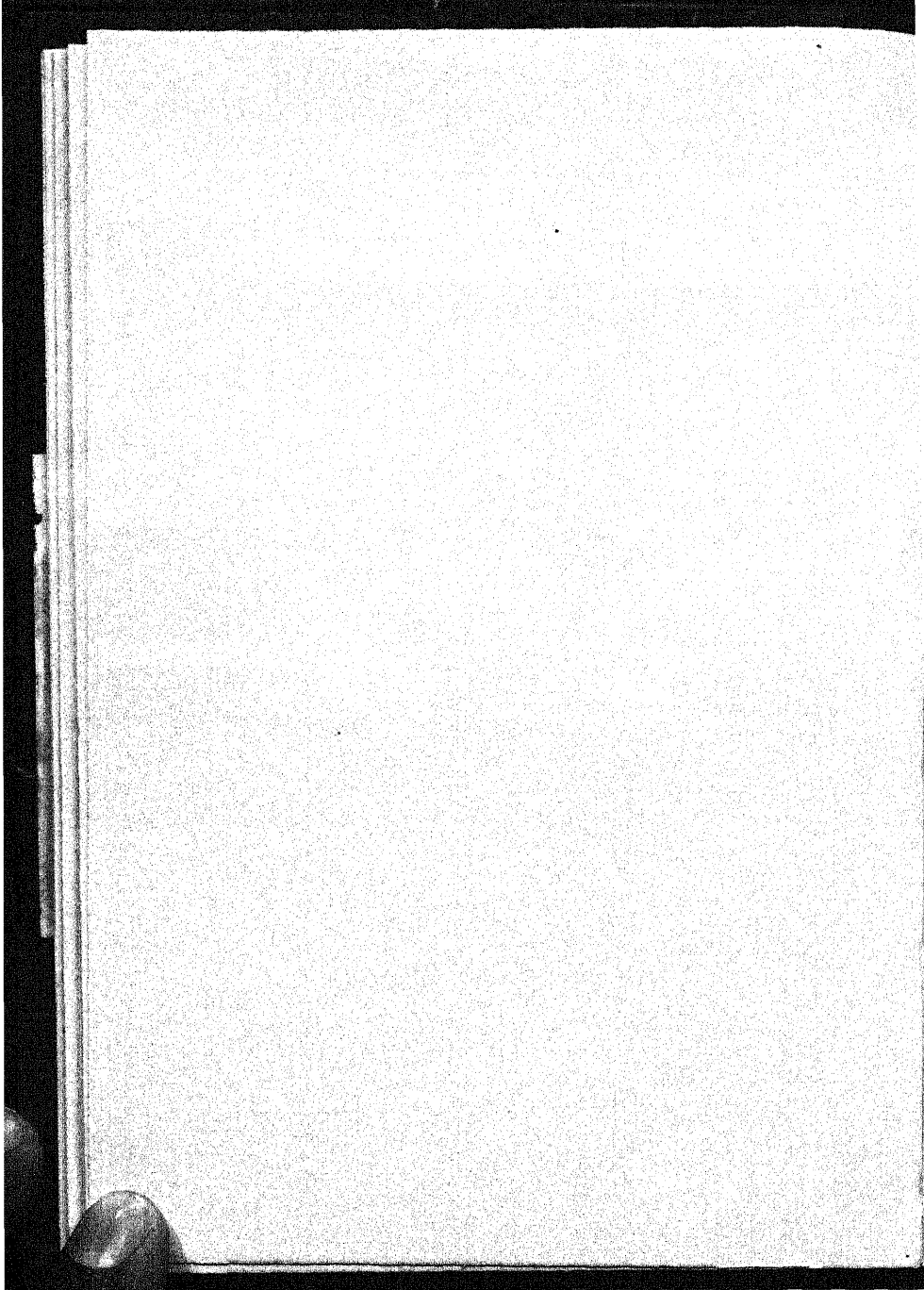
who, after long struggles with sordid poverty, was made rich overnight by some unsuspected will. He enters joyfully upon his inheritance. Well, as the Word made Flesh is the greatest gift man has ever received, we should not cower or shrink, but stand up and walk abroad like free men and women, rejoicing in our inheritance, fearless and unafraid.

No Christian ever has to explain God. The nature of the Supreme Energy we can not define. All our faith, all our hopes, are based on One Person. If He rose from the grave, we hope to be with Him in Paradise. If He died and mouldered in decay and ruin, that is what we ask for

ourselves. For wherever He is, that is where we want to be.



“LET ME GO ON!”



"LET ME GO ON!"

"Love is the best? 'T is somewhat late!
And all thou dost enumerate
Of power and beauty in the world,
The mightiness of love was curled
Inextricably round about
Love lay within it and without,
To clasp thee,—but in vain! Thy soul
Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
Still set deliberate aside
His love!—Now take love! Well betide
Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
The show of love for the name's sake,
Remembering every moment Who,
Beside creating thee unto
These ends, and these for thee, was said
To undergo death in thy stead
In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
What doubt in thee could countervail
Belief in it? Upon the ground
'That in the story had been found
Too much love! How could God love so?'
He who in all his works below
Adapted to the needs of man,
Made love the basis of the plan,—
Did love, as was demonstrated:
While man, who was so fit instead
To hate, as every day gave proof,—
Man thought man, for this kind's behoof,
Both could and did invent that scheme

Of perfect love: 't would well beseem
Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
Not tally with God's usual ways!"

And I cowered deprecatingly—
"Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
Or grant what shall seem heaven almost!
Let me not know that all is lost,
Though lost it be—leave me not tied
To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
Let that old life seem mine—no more—
With limitation as before,
With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
Be all the earth a wilderness!
Only let me go on, go on,
Still hoping ever and anon
To reach one eve the Better Land!"
Then did the form expand, expand—
I knew Him through the dread disguise
As the whole God within His eyes
Embraced me. When I lived again,
The day was breaking,—the gray plain
I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
Was this a vision? False or true?
Since then, three varied years are spent,
And commonly my mind is bent
To think it was a dream—be sure
A mere dream and distemperature—
The last day's watching: then the night,—
The shock of that strange Northern Light
Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. And so I live, you see,

Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God, she still each method tries
To catch me, who may yet escape,
She knows,—the fiend in angel's shape!
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said!
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows drear
Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, 'How dreadful to be grudged
No ease henceforth, as one that 's judged.
Condemned to earth forever, shut
From heaven!' But Easter Day breaks! But
Christ rises! Mercy every way
Is infinite,—and who can say?"

—From Robert Browning's *Easter Day*